

## **Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting Summary**

October 26, 2017 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM  
MassDEP, One Winter Street, Boston, MA

### **Recycling Markets Update**

Greg Cooper of MassDEP spoke about the recent Chinese government restrictions on imports of recyclables (including mixed paper and mixed plastics) to China via the “National Sword” policy. As of January 1, 2018, the contamination threshold for incoming bales will be reduced to 0.3%. At the same time, there are questions about how many Chinese recycling import licenses will be renewed. The duration of these import restrictions is unknown. In the long run, the Chinese recycling industry will need feedstock from US markets.

Regardless of the length of these restrictions, there are and will continue to be impacts on material demand. Materials are continuing to move, however values have dropped due to reduced demand and recyclers are facing increased bale inspections for contamination levels. As a result, material recovery facilities (MRFs) have adjusted their processing to remove additional contaminants, which has increased their operating costs. MassDEP has met with MRF operators to discuss these issues and steps that MassDEP can take to support MRFs, such as allowing for temporary increased material storage. MassDEP has communicated information about National Sword to municipalities and to businesses through RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts.

These market adjustments have made it clear that it is critical to improve the quality of recyclables and reduce contamination in both the short term and the long term. MassDEP has worked to improve the quality of municipal recycling programs’ materials through the Recycling IQ Kit. Common contaminants include plastic bags, bagged garbage, bagged recyclables, food waste, hoses, or materials people think might be recyclable but actually are not in MRFs. Municipalities should be moving to reduce contaminants via outreach to their residents and making use of Recycling IQ Kit materials available on the [MassDEP website](#). In addition, MassDEP has funding available for improving MRF processing via the Recycling Business Development Grants.

Q: Has MassDEP devoted attention on contingency planning for the “what if” scenario if storage limits are exceeded and materials still can’t be recycled?

A: MassDEP does have the ability to issue short term waste ban waivers to allow for the disposal of waste ban materials that cannot be recycled. However, it is important to note that MassDEP will not issue a waiver due to reduced material values, only if material cannot be recycled at all. Any waiver request would be handled on a case by case basis and would require documentation from a MRF operator that no recycling markets are available for the specified material. MassDEP does not expect to issue waivers to haulers. Rather they should continue to deliver material to MRFs and any decisions about waivers will be made at the MRF level.

Q: Has MassDEP taken any looks at recycling contracts and “change of law” provisions in recycling contracts?

A: We've heard different scenarios from different entities. Entities need to read their contracts and understand what they say, and understand any change of law provisions.

Comment: The days of zero price points or recycling rebates are over. The last thing we want to do is to see a facility like Casella close and municipalities may need to pay more for recycling.

Response to comment: This may be true, however recycling markets have dropped many times before and rebounded. In addition, it appears likely that disposal tip fees will continue to rise, so that recycling can continue to be a cost-effective materials management approach, even without revenue payments. At the same time, it is important to remember that there are many other important economic and environmental benefits from recycling, both locally and nationally.

### **RecyclingWorks and Green Team Updates**

Emily Fabel of the Center for EcoTechnology provided an update on the RecyclingWorks program for fiscal year 2017. Emily also summarized Green Team activities for FY17, with 332 registrations across 300 schools, impacting over 60,000 students. Green Team Curriculum Alignment documents have also been updated. More information is available in the meeting presentations previously sent out to the SWAC list by MassDEP. If you need these presentations, please contact Sean Sylver at [sean.sylver@state.ma.us](mailto:sean.sylver@state.ma.us).

Q: Since the food waste ban has gone into effect, how much of a change has there been in food donation?

A: Reports show about a 35% increase in food donation, primarily from rescue of fresh and perishable foods.

Q: Is there still a lack of processing capacity for food waste?

A: No, this does not appear to be a barrier at this time. In addition to compost and animal feed operations, there are now de-packaging facilities that process packaged food material, recycle packaging, and separate food materials for anaerobic digestion, composting, or animal feed. There are also several additional anaerobic digestion facilities that are currently ramping up operations and several more that will be built and operating in 2018.

### **Solid Waste Master Plan Survey Results and Materials Management Capacity Analysis**

John Fischer gave presentations on survey responses that MassDEP received from stakeholders and on a materials management capacity analysis that MassDEP will be conducting. John announced that MassDEP issued a request for quotes and selected Eastern Research Group (ERG) to provide contractor assistance to MassDEP on the Solid Waste Master Plan (SWMP) development. John introduced Allie Phillips, who will be ERG's assigned staff person to support MassDEP's SWMP work. Allie will be working for MassDEP on a part-time basis, providing support on planning meeting and stakeholder processes, gathering data and conducting analysis, and conducting program and policy analysis to support the SWMP development.

John then reviewed responses to the SWMP survey, which was developed to gather input on relevant issues to the Master Plan, and was distributed to the SWAC email lists in the fall. It received 28 responses. John also discussed the need to develop a more complete picture of materials management capacity in the state. MassDEP will be issuing an RFQ to gather data and conduct analysis on disposal and materials management capacity in Massachusetts. More information is available in the meeting presentations previously sent out to the SWAC list by MassDEP. If you need these presentations, please contact Sean Sylver at [sean.sylver@state.ma.us](mailto:sean.sylver@state.ma.us).

Q: You had a lot of resources in developing the 2010-2020 Master Plan, and you have less this time. Can you quantify this?

A: In developing the last SWMP, MassDEP had three staff who spent a significant portion of their time working on the SWMP process. This time we will be doing things differently, with smaller contributions from staff across MassDEP's recycling and solid waste programs, supplemented by the contractor assistance from ERG.

Q: Can you circulate a link to the web page where this will be?

A: It will not be posted at this time. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts website is going through a comprehensive redesign. During this time, existing web pages are frozen in place and will not be updated until the new platform is released. Website redesign should be done by the end of the calendar year. For now documents will be shared via the SWAC email list until web posting ability is restored.

Q: How many people received this survey? Although you got some good input, the response rate seems low. It doesn't seem like a strong starting point, and MassDEP should put thought in how to make the SWMP process robust

A: The survey was sent to the full SWAC list, with a few reminders. The SWAC list is about 400. The survey was intended as a starting point for obtaining input into the SWMP development. MassDEP plans an extensive stakeholder engagement process to support development of the SWMP with many opportunities to provide input.

C: We shouldn't put too much time into the survey that got 28 responses. The reason people came to meetings about the food waste ban is because it is a ban. The SWMP is not enforced and MassDEP does not have the staff to prepare the numbers needed to inform the plan. The SWMP is not a useful document, unless it is enforceable.

Response to comment: The SWMP is a policy document and, in that sense, it is not enforceable. However, the SWMP does contain regulatory strategies that MassDEP does enforce. As far as data, MassDEP will be preparing several data documents to support the SWMP development, including 2016 solid waste data, an analysis of waste characterization data, and the capacity study presented at this meeting.

Q: What plans does MassDEP have to coordinate with the Legislature on solid waste policy issues? Some people in attendance recently sat in on a legislative sessions about waste bills.

A: MassDEP is aware of the bills that are on Beacon Hill. MassDEP does provide comment on bills that affect solid waste policy issues. The SWMP can provide information about potential legislative priorities for consideration by legislators.

C: There is a low level of awareness among legislators about the SWMP and MassDEP should conduct more outreach to legislators to ensure that they are of the SWMP and MassDEP's policy and legislative recommendations.

Q: What is the timeline for awarding the final round of Sustainable Materials Recovery Program grants?

A: They are under review, but MassDEP hopes to award these grants shortly.

Q: What is the timeline for completing a draft SWMP, holding a public comment period, and publishing a final plan?

A: MassDEP does not have a specific timeline for each of these steps, however the goal is to finalize the new SWMP by the end of 2020.

Q: When do you expect to reconvene the Data Subcommittee?

A: MassDEP does anticipate having a subcommittee meeting focused on data and capacity issues. However, we still need to finalize the scope of this group and do not have specific meetings set at this time.

C: By 2020 Massachusetts will lose a large amount of in-state disposal capacity. The biggest driver to increase diversion is high disposal costs. In Australia, disposal costs are around \$250-350 per ton and this drives serious interest and focus on reducing disposal.

C: The capacity study is a great idea but MassDEP should ensure that the study scope looks at the Southern New England Region. We see waste flows between Northeast states on a daily basis.